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### The Staged Self in Mary Carleton's Autobiographical Narratives

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**CLCWeb Volume 7 Issue 3 (September 2005) Article 7**

**Geraldine Wagner,**

**"The Staged Self in Mary Carleton's Autobiographical Narratives"**

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**Contents of CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture 7.3(2005)**

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**Abstract:** In her paper, "The Staged Self in Mary Carleton's Autobiographical Narratives," Geraldine Wagner examines Mary Carleton's use of romance and picaresque modes of self-representation to appropriate and redefine counterfeiting as a legitimate means to identity. The most notorious female criminal of the English Restoration, Mary Carleton, captured the public's imagination in 1662 when she stood trial for bigamy. Although acquitted on insufficient evidence, the allegation that she was a common shoemaker's wife counterfeiting the identity of a German noblewoman spawned a war of pamphlets of competing biographical accounts between Carleton and her detractors. Wagner argues that these attempts to confine Carleton to an essentialist view of selfhood demonstrate how her self-styling tapped a deep well of cultural anxiety regarding the instability of gender, class, and ethnic identity. She contends that to read Carleton's life as a German noble as a mere criminal con or even an inventive fiction is to discredit her lived experience unjustly. For, in staging herself through live and textual performance, Carleton not only created a valuable literary (and theatrical) commodity, but also subverted successfully an economics in which counterfeits were otherwise considered worthless.

**Geraldine WAGNER**

### **The Staged Self in Mary Carleton's Autobiographical Narratives**

The most notorious female criminal of the Restoration, Mary Carleton, first captured the English public's imagination in 1662 when she stood trial for bigamy. Although acquitted on insufficient evidence, the two-fold sensationalism of the trial instantly made her a profitable literary commodity. Not only had she been accused of exploiting the economies of courtship and marriage by which women were customarily interpellated into patriarchal culture as the exploitees, but she was also - even more scandalously -- alleged to be impersonating the character of a German noblewoman when she was "really" Mary Stedman of Canterbury, a shoemaker's wife. The widespread fascination with Carleton's performative selves -- the controversy over which produced at least twenty-seven pamphlets with competing biographical narratives -- evidenced how her self-reinvention tapped a deep well of cultural anxiety concerning the indeterminacy of gender, class, and ethnic identity. This anxiety is particularly visible in two pamphlets, *The Replication* and *Ultimum Vale* by John Carleton (her husband), and her biography, *The Counterfeit Lady Unveiled* by Francis Kirkman. Both of these men construct Carleton as the quintessential picaresque rogue, and, thereby attempt to contain her disruptive theatricality with a discourse of empirical truth that crumbles, ultimately, under each man's desire to possess Carleton as a textual body through a series of sexually charged linguistic strategies. Indeed, their strategies and motives for controlling the threat of the transgressive female form that appears in Mary Carleton's memoirs, especially *The Case of Mary Carleton, Lately Styled the German Princess*, are so similar as to suggest that theirs may be considered historically specific male responses to the challenges to class and gender hierarchies implicit in Carleton's protean self-portraits (oral, visual, and textual). Both men try to fix her identity as a conventional picara by stripping her of the sartorial self-fashioning through which she re-values the picara as a romance hero. Both also equate nakedness with truth and employ highly sexualized metaphors for the linguistic dominance they seek to achieve over Carleton's textual and material bodies. These attempts to master this unruly and evasive female subject reveal their authors' fears of emasculation by her gender-transgressive female pen and alleged male costuming, especially since they identify unwittingly with her and with the feminine, thus further destabilizing the gender hierarchies their texts would enforce.

John Carleton writes and publishes *The Replication* and *Ultimum Vale* in 1663, shortly after the bigamy trial from which his wife -- not he -- emerged victorious. Having been defeated in a court of law, he hoped with these pamphlets to reverse this verdict -- at least in the court of public opinion. To this end, he promises in *The Replication* to reduce Mary to a single, stable identity by "undress[ing] all these prodigious shapes, and set[ting] them out singly in the naked truth" (A1V), a claim that Kirkman extends in *The Counterfeit Lady* to unveiling so as to penetrate her "privacy" (8) and represent "her inside" (11). Stories of Carleton being stripped by authority figures, with their obvious quasi-sexual appeal to male readers, are utilized by her detractors as literal enactments of the divestment their texts attempt to perform figuratively through a semiotics of self-sameness. Even the anonymous pamphlet, *The Female Hector, or the Germane Lady Turn'd Monsieur* (1663), has her stripped "to her old weeds" at the governor of Amsterdam's command when it is discovered there that she is merely impersonating a "Distressed Lady." However, Carleton's vow to "undress" his wife for his reading public is particularly resonant, because we can assume that as her (current) husband, he has knowledge of the body beneath her "disguise." This willingness to sell the naked body of his wife into the hands of readers for their own private perusal aligns Carleton with the quintessential picaro, Guzman, who prostitutes his wife likewise. Here and in his conniving pursuit of Mary Carleton's assumed fortune, a slippage occurs in which he, rather than she, is proven to be a rogue. Yet despite his sexual relations with his Carleton he confesses on a number of occasions that this familiarity gave him no superior insights into her identity: "You may imagine ... that she having begun such a designe [upon me], and pretending to be such a person, how cunningly she glossed over her Romantick storyes and pretences with great zeal as coming from a Nunnery, a handsome and noble deportment as a person of quality, and good lan-

guages as being well breed; all which are but suitable, and to be expected to make her self out, had she been what she pretended and represented her self to be, which seeming reality did in a growing familiarity and acquaintance increase mine and many wise persons beleife (*Ultimum Vale* 18). Here, closer acquaintance increases his credulity, since she is possessed of all the manners and learning that are suitable to and expected of a noble. Similarly, the reader's own greater familiarity with Mary Carleton through John Carleton's text fails to convince that her corporeality is a site of ultimate revelation or stability. If, as John Carleton scornfully contends, she is "Only in shape a Woman, nay scarce so, / For Proteus like she can in all shapes go" (15) nothing can strip her of her morphological powers--by which he often feels "overpowered" (10, 46) -- because they exist at the corporeal level.

It is, in fact, primarily the need to secure his own manhood that motivates Carleton to try to control and contain this variously signifying woman. For, as he himself all but admits, his inability to master either Mary Carleton's material or textual body makes him feel "too effeminate" and puts his masculinity in question (11). This fear of emasculation is voiced most obviously near the end of *Ultimum Vale* where John accuses Mary of cross-dressing. Taking his cue perhaps from *The Female Hector* which portrays her as growing so much "more valiant in her undertaking" after her acquittal that she began to dress as "a noble and Heroic Campion" (8), John says, "this pretty Fiddler's brat went to the Right Honorable the Lord Mayor in man's apparel" (39). As Mihoko Suzuki notes, the assumption made in his and other hostile texts is that "Carleton's successful imposture as an aristocratic lady inevitably leads--whether in fact or in the popular imagination -- to her masquerade as a man; the transgression of one category (class) implies or entails the transgression of another (gender)" (69). John Carleton's construction of his wife as a cross-dresser acknowledges this equation of one transgression with the other, and the anxiety over possession of the phallus that it provoked in men. In wishing to demonstrate the grievous extremity of Mary's defiance of normative gender roles he calls attention to his own deviance therefrom as her effeminized husband. Hero Chalmers holds that "In the Restoration theatre ... female transvestism [is recuperated] by means of the objectifying male gaze, which relishes the unequivocally female body displayed more evidently in male attire"(184). Given the demeaning, highly sexualized portrait of Mary that appears throughout John's text, his allusion to her as a transvestite may equally be prompted by this same recuperative motive: a containment strategy which demonstrates how the social threat she poses is inextricably bound up with her sex and sexuality. So threatened is John by Mary's transgressiveness that he not only unwittingly casts himself in *Ultimum Vale* as both rogue and "woman" in relation to her, he even writes himself into the role of defendant. As Mihoko Suzuki observes: "In refuting her assertions he not only repeats and confirms her story, he unwittingly writes as if he himself were on trial" (74). In the postscript he appends to his text upon hearing that *The Case of Mary Carleton, Lately Styled the German Princess* has been published, he vents his frustration at Carleton's cheating him of having the last word -- even momentarily -- in this debate on her identity. The proliferation of her texts, like that of her corporeal identities, is continually beyond his control. In what Chalmers calls an "image of literal body-writing" meant to "forestall any further ambiguities by indelibly imprinting identity or meaning on her body itself" (183), John threatens that if she writes any more he will "whet [his] Pen and send a Satyr to her to scratch and lash her till the blood comes for her just deserts"(*Ultimum Vale* 40). He repeats this threat again some pages later: "she shall find I will let her blood in the right Vein [by] send[ing] her Companions enough, such Satyrs, as she had better have no being then to feel the smart of their sharp wounding lashes" (46).

Jonathan Sawday describes the literary association between dissection and satire that is signified by Carleton's scalpel-like pen: "In the literary sphere, dissection and anatomization have come to be associated with satire and hence with a violent and often destructive impulse, no matter how artfully concealed. A literary/satiric dissection, then, may be undertaken in order to render powerless the structures within which the dissector's knife is probing" (1). John Carleton tries to write over and into Carleton's textual body as the means to lashing into her material corpus and marking her according to his fears and desires, but in doing so he unwittingly turns that scalpel upon himself. Sawday says that the emblem of Renaissance culture "was the reductive deity of division,

whose attributes were the mirror and the knife" (3). In applying his pen/knife to Carleton whom Kirkman describes as "a looking-glass wherein we may see the Vices of this Age Epitomized" (95), John's portrait of her reflects his own divided self. Perhaps this is why he is so appalled by her "unparalleled confidence in Permit[ting] the Counterfeit Effigies of her ill-shapen painted face to be inserted as a Prologue" (*Ultimum Vale* 41) to her just-released *The Case of Mary Carleton*. Suzuki observes that although Carleton offers herself as "an object of the male gaze in [these two etchings] ... the literal doubleness of her portrait -- one representing her as an innocent girl of twenty-two, the other representing her as a dignified lady of thirty-eight -- calls attention to the multiplicity of roles she plays in her narrative and her refusal to be fixed in a single role by that 'determining gaze'" (64). These "Effigies" that so disturb Carleton (and later Kirkman) are accompanied by a caption in which Carleton asserts: "Henceforth there needs no mark of me be known / For the right Counterfeit is herein shown" (74). John's critique seeks to reduce to its negative, economically derived meaning, the double valence of "counterfeit" as it signifies both in the prefatory portraits and the narrative that follows; for in both, Carleton exploits the slippage between counterfeit's dual meanings of image and imitation. Indeed, the double entendre at work in Carleton's use of the term seems to signal a collapsing of difference between identity and disguise. In the *Oxford English Dictionary* "counterfeit" has both positive and negative connotations. It can refer to a theatrical or visual image/imitation of a person that successfully and legitimately conveys the likeness of its subject. It can equally imply impersonation for fraudulent purposes, and thus a false and worthless image/imitation of a true and valuable original. This second sense is derived from the word's use as an economic term. It is this latter meaning that Frances Kirkman employs in the title and text of his biography of Carleton, *The Counterfeit Lady Unveiled* (1673). According to him Mary is "wholly composed of falsehood" (12). In his preface "To The Reader" Kirkman reproduces the aforementioned caption but subtly changes the adjective "right" modifying "counterfeit" to "true, " so that in his text the lines read: "Hence-forth there needs no mark of me be known / For the true Counterfeit is herein shown." This change is neither minor nor accidental, as it signals his rejection of Carleton's intention of constructing a legitimate self, independent of extratextual referents. Indeed, this alteration introduces the essentialist notion of selfhood to which Kirkman will attempt to subject Carleton throughout this biography, as he presumptuously seeks to reduce her to a knowable object of inquiry. Moreover, by publishing *The Counterfeit Lady Unveiled* soon after her execution for petty thievery on 22 January 1673, Kirkman imagines he is having the final word on Carleton. However, he never accomplishes this goal, because he undermines repeatedly his own discourse in which Carleton remains an ever elusive figure.

Presenting himself as the objective man of science and history, Kirkman situates his *The Counterfeit Lady Unveiled* as the genuine article against her Case which, according to his reasoning, is, like Carleton herself, "wholly composed of falsehood" (12). By emphasizing the economic sense of counterfeit, Kirkman seeks to reaffirm the opposition between image and imitation that Carleton's use of the term successfully deconstructs positing, as it does, the self-referentiality of representation. Whereas John Carleton's pamphlets were involved in a dialogue with Mary Carleton's, Kirkman's text writes hers off as romantic fictions: he rejects her whole account of her early history in Germany saying, "I shall contradict the opinion of many, and what she always said of herself, yet I tell you that according to my best intelligence, which I think is sufficiently authentic ... [her whole story of herself] was but a romance" (12-13). Which sources constitute his "best intelligence" he states more explicitly in regard to the matter of her age and date of birth; Kirkman dismisses Carleton's own claim as a fabrication, choosing to give more credibility to the "opinion of her husband and several of her intimate acquaintance" (14). The implication is that sexual intimacy provides a privileged knowledge of the subject, since truth is thought to be corporeally inscribed. Even where Kirkman does include Carleton's own voice -- and he does lift approximately fifteen pages from *The Case of Madam Mary Carleton* -- it is only because her husband's own account appears to substantiate hers: "the aforesaid book I examined and, comparing it to [John] Carleton's report, cannot find it or her guilty of any considerable untruth" (22). Further, he makes the ingenious authorial move of concentrating on the decade following the trial and her memoirs -- about which she herself had never written. He thus produces a portrait that is largely uncontested

by Carleton's own writings and to which she no longer has the ability to respond. Refusing to see that Carleton could simultaneously be both a *picara* and a romantic heroína, he replaces the history she supplies with a thoroughly picaresque version of her early years, and portrays her life in that decade between her acquittal and hanging as the adventures of a legendary rogue. The Carleton he inscribes is a master of complex and exquisitely performed marital/courtship scams, who, according to type, becomes a sincere penitent in her final days in prison (where he visits and interviews her) and at her execution (to which he is an eye witness). This portrayal of Carleton as a rogue whose transgressions ultimately undo her suits his professed agenda of making her an exemplum of moral corruption in Restoration society. As the publisher and author of Part Two of *The English Rogue*, it is probably safe to assume that his interest in Carleton is less moralistic than commercial. Indeed, evidence suggests that Kirkman must have seen the lucrative potential of writing Carleton as the female counterpart to his already well-known *picaro*. However, his motives clearly exceed this investment in authorizing her life. He does not only wish to make a commercial success of containing the potential subversion of class and gender hierarchies that her criminal and socially illicit actions imply, but also desires to gain more intimate knowledge of her than even John Carleton can be assumed to have possessed through carnal familiarity. His use of the word "unveiled" in the biography's title is itself revealing of the desirous nature of Kirkman's engagement with his subject. Counterfeits are not literally unveiled; they are exposed as having no legitimate value. This mixed metaphor signifies the duality of his desires and objectives. Most obviously, unveiled connotes the act of stripping Carleton of her sartorial disguise (as John a decade earlier had promised) in order to expose the naked truth of her identity. It implies that her clothing is a palimpsest of lies, which cover the true inscriptions to be read in the depths of her corporeality, and Kirkman ascribes to himself the ability to penetrate and reveal that truth.

As mentioned in relation to John Carleton's "body writing," this sexualized linguistic dominance has its correlative in the anatomy theatre where the truth, especially regarding sexual difference, was sought in the hidden recesses of corporeality with a similarly sadistic eroticism. With his claims to painstaking research and a skeptic's reserve, Kirkman inscribes himself as the empirical scientist, Carleton as anatomizable nature. His title even recalls that of the famous Renaissance painting "Nature Unveiling for Science." The semiotic crossover of "unveiling" between these two forms of dissection links the sexualized aspect of their similar agendas. Moreover, the bodies available to anatomists were those of executed criminals (both male and female), so that Carleton's transgression made her particularly susceptible to various endeavors at unveiling. Unveiling has further, sexualized connotations: the word veil is sometimes associated with a woman's hymens, which the *Oxford English Dictionary* defines as "The virginal membrane, a fold of mucous membrane stretched across and partially closing the external orifice of the vagina," while, similarly, one possible meaning for veil (also in the *OED*) is that of "a membranous appendage or part, serving as a cover or screen." Also, when young women became nuns they were said to be taking the veil, which veil symbolized their choice of a virgin life. Given the sexualized nature of most Carleton exposés, the innuendo involved in this title would probably have been apparent to many seventeenth century readers. It was even rumored in one of the popular pamphlets released to Carleton's detractors that her name was Mary de Vulva, as she explains: "by this time they had obtained my Name for me, viz., Maria de Wolway, which passage also hath suffered by another lewder Imposture, and allusory sound of De Vulva" (38-39). By attempting to reduce Carleton to her sex and sexuality, this slur suggests that the perceived nature of her threat to the status quo was specifically feminine and bodily. This unveiling also has legal implications since, as a married woman, Carleton would have been considered a "femme covert." The *Lawes Resolutions of Womens Rights* (1632) states that "A woman as soone as she is married is called covert, in Latine, nupta, that is, vailed, as it were, clouded and over-shadowed, she hath lost her streame, she is continually sub potestate viri" (124-25). In other words, she is presumably protected, but also subsumed by her husband. According to these terms, unveiling Carleton would strip her of such male protection, but also lift this oppressive, subsuming cover from her identity. It is only this latter unveiling that Kirkman accomplishes, as his text represents her first and foremost as always



independent, self-made, and willing to accept the risks involved in being a woman non-veiled by a male presence.

In addition to voicing Kirkman's own desires, *The Counterfeit Lady Unveiled* also contains an appeal to the voyeurism of the reader, who is invited to the unveiling and promised the opportunity of knowing Carleton as an exposed and possessable textual body. Kirkman says, when describing her appearance in court: "Her habit now at her trial was an Indian striped gown, silk petticoat, white shoes with slaps, laced with green; and in these she was hanged, and I think buried. This was her outside. What her inside was, by reading this book, you will sufficiently be acquainted" (11). Notice how he conflates her trial and execution by remarking that she wore the same attire for both. Unbeknownst to him, he is acknowledging her consistency and the possibility that she was her outside. He is also already showing how Carleton is likely to frustrate his willingness to prostitute her as a textual body to readers for whom this sense of violation should be equally exciting. This is in keeping with Roger Thompson's claim that "the depiction of female rogues became highly sexualized from the time of the Restoration" (73). Chalmers too notes how most depictions of Carleton "associate her with the contemporary literature of prostitution" (171). This appeal to the reader's prurient desire to view her naked truth, assumes that Carleton's text/body is indelibly marked with proof that she was, as he claims, "an absolute Englishwoman ... of Canterbury in the county of Kent" (Kirkman 12-13). But Carleton frustrates Kirkman at every turn, because distinctions between truth and falsehood are, from the outset, hard for him to maintain. Despite his promise of unveiling, he admits in the second paragraph of his narrative: "If I should promise to give you a true account of her whole life I should deceive you, for how can truth be discovered of her who was wholly composed of falsehood?" (12). He does not want for facts from his many interviews with those who say they knew her, but Carleton's nature makes questionable the very notion of fact. Her autobiography might be a romance by his definition, but that definition crumbles when he begrudgingly admits "she had told this lie so often that she at last believed it herself to be true" (13). In fact, (as with John Carleton) his own portrait of her constantly betrays him. As he describes her, Carleton has all the attributes of a German noblewoman: she speaks German fluently, exhibits a great deal of classical learning, and comports herself with all the refinement and delicacy one would expect of a dignified aristocrat. Clearly, Kirkman never achieves the linguistic control he wishes to exert on his subject, but says repeatedly or permits Carleton to say, things that confound the very assumptions underlying his project.

On more than one occasion Kirkman utterly betrays his own logic by conceding that counterfeiting is the very "oxygen" Carleton needs to live: "You might as well expect to have a fish live out of water as to expect her to be without acting some of these falsities, and in all these things she was as false as Hell" (55). Here falseness signifies not as the opposite of truth, but rather as a refusal to remain confined by social expectations of self-sameness. He even employs a theatrical metaphor to describe identity, despite his theorizing it as inherently fixed. He mentions that after her acquittal from bigamy charges Carleton came to act the part of herself in a play by Thomas Porter "styled by her glorious name of The German Princess," but that "she did not perform so well as was expected ... [because] she acted much better, and more to the life in the wide world than in that epitome" (51). This play, also known as *A Witty Combat*, given in April 1664 at the Lincoln's Inn, depicts Carleton as smart, likable, convincing but utterly fraudulent. By accepting the role Carleton appears to have capitulated to the image of typical picaresque that she resists in her memoirs. However, assuming that Carleton is a consummate actress for whom playing many different roles is a way of being, her poor performance as a fraud might subtly signal a refusal to concede that this rogue persona is any closer to her true self than that of her previous self-projections. In other words, by claiming that she acted better "on the large theater of the world" (51) Kirkman is unwittingly acknowledging her success in drawing attention to all identity as theatrical. But most damaging to Kirkman's argument is what he says of Carleton's transformative abilities: "She had such an art in disguising herself that it was very difficult to know her. She could upon occasion alter not only the air of her countenance, but also some of her features would seem to be different. To conclude, she had such a face, such a carriage, and such a tongue, as would deceive a very piercing eye" (75). This shape-shifting is both disturbing and fascinating to Kirkman

who is himself an ambitious merchant. Although he would like to believe that she is indelibly marked as a bigamist, and to hold her accountable for the fraudulence it involves, his text attests again and again to her protean powers and the fact that metamorphosis is possible, not just at the sartorial and linguistic levels, but at that of corporeality. Her thievery and con-artistry do not necessarily preclude her pretenses to nobility. Moreover, it is hard to believe that Kirkman, a thriving entrepreneurial member of the middle class, subscribes to the same hierarchical view of identity to which he would hold Carleton. He accuses Carleton disdainfully of being addicted to romance and the whims it inspires but in his own autobiography, *The Unlucky Citizen*, he confesses to the same love of romance and the notions of class transgression it indulges: "When I came to Knight Errantry ... I was contented beyond measure, and (believing all I read to be true) wished myself Squire to one of these Knights" (11). Indeed, he admits that he hesitated to pick a profession because he "had such a fond and idle opinion" that like Amadis de Gaul and other knights who discovered themselves eventually to be of noble parentage, he "might prove to be some great person" (11). Kirkman's dilemma then is that while he finds her class transgressions fascinating, he is threatened by the gender transgressions with which they are associated intricately. His psychological portrait of her motives for desiring social mobility itself implies a deep identification with Carleton, yet he feels compelled to prove her "an absolute Englishwoman" because he cannot abide her deceiving and profiting from male suitors.

Given the one-sex model of sexual difference to which Kirkman would have subscribed, it is not surprising that he views Carleton's class transgressions as facilitating gender ones. Thomas Laqueur, who describes this model (first suggested by Aristotle and developed at length by Galen in the second century) in *Making Sex*, claims that from ancient times through the Renaissance "culture, in short, suffused and changed the body that to the modern sensibility seems so closed, autarchic, and outside the realm of meaning" (7), so that "in these texts it did strange, remarkable, and to modern readers impossible things" (7): "Girls could turn into boys, and men who associated too extensively with women could ... regress into effeminacy" (7). This volatility of the sexed body was based on Galen's humoral theory of corporeality in which "women were essentially men in whom a lack of heat -- of perfection -- had resulted in the retention, inside, of structures that in the male are visible without" (4). Following Laqueur's lead, Robert Shoemaker argues in *Gender in English Society: 1650-1850*, that during this period "anatomy was a 'representational strategy' in which perceptions about gender differences were imposed on notions of the body" (34-35); for, "despite a considerable amount of anatomical research and increasing skepticism of Aristotelian ideas, [humoral, Galenic] theories remained influential into the seventeenth century" (19). Given this, it was imagined that a spirited (hot-blooded) woman could in fact literally/physically become a man. This supposition founds the anxiety regarding Carleton, whose usurpation of the aggressor's role in courtship connotes a potential for transgression of her sex itself. Kirkman's anxiety functions on this level, since it is a measure of his masculinity that he unveil her as a fixed, stable and possessable female body. In trying to fix and possess Carleton Kirkman finds himself in the same position as her many cheated suitors. Yet, while Kirkman is often angered by the gender-destabilizing implications of Carleton's manipulation of the rituals of courtship and the institution of marriage (both of which were meant to serve male interests), he seems to derive quite a bit of pleasure from telling how she frustrated the plans of prospective lovers/husbands. This allows him to construct himself as having an intimacy with her that the others have failed to achieve. The sexualized component of his desire to possess Carleton intellectually is never more evident than in those places where Kirkman goes to inordinate lengths to defend Carleton's reputation from the inference of a promiscuous and insatiable appetite for which other authors made her infamous. He argues that despite her bigamy and the sexual aspect of her scams, he believes she had little interest in sex except as she could use it to her advantage in her criminal adventures: "She was not much guilty of that crime of inconstancy. Her husband Carleton told me that he did not at all believe her to be a common prostitute, not to be enjoyed by every one that courted her, that she had not great inclination that way" (55). "I know several idle fellows [he says] [please, revise this quotation] who would pretend they had been very inward with the German Princess, [but] let them be never so confident or debauched she knew how to frustrate their ex-



pectations, so that this crime she was not so guilty of, as the world supposes (55). In other words, if she is not physically virginal, she is psychologically so. He does not literally need her to be a virgin, but he does wish to keep her pure of desire. However, he is repeatedly unable to suppress the sexual component of her passion for the trick -- that insatiable desire that has no specific object. Her roving from one deceived and exploited would-be lover to the next is similar to the behavior of libertines such as Wilmot and Etheridge, in their restless ramblings from one conquest to the next.

Ultimately, Kirkman cannot comprehend how her pleasure is aroused not by the objects she gains but by the role-playing itself. Like all those before him who attempted literally and/or figuratively to strip her of an identity they too perceived as false, Kirkman is constantly frustrated in his desire to access a true self located in the body beneath the sartorial "disguise." The veil he desires to lift is, as Jacques Derrida argues in his *Dissemination*, where he discusses the hymen as a figure for deferment in textuality, neither present nor absent, because "the syntax of its fold makes it impossible for us to arrest its play or its indecision" (231). It is not that there is no Carleton here; just that he fails to reduce her to a singularity that would legitimize one identity at the expense of others -- that would have the *picara* invalidate the romance heroine. But if the economy of Kirkman's desire is frustrated by such deferment, his economic success as a bookseller is all but guaranteed by this frustration. That Carleton escapes him and remains elusive and mysterious is the condition of the reader's desire too. If she is exposed, it is as a chameleon who escapes the economy of possession via unveiling. The *picara* is the romance hero as the *picara* is the romance hero as Carleton herself repeatedly proves in *The Case of Madam Mary Carleton, Lately Stiled the German Princess*, where she portrays herself successfully as both, thereby giving testimony to the "authenticity" of her performative identity in a society which officially had no ideologically accommodating place for such performativity -- neither in its social strata, gender categories, nor its systems of belief regarding nature, nurture, nation and bodies/nobodies -- despite its renewed, post-interregnum fascination with theatre. Her own text, moreover, testifies to the power of romance and picaresque literatures to construct transgressive bodily female subjectivities, as it continually shows Carleton engaging these literatures as material life strategies. But, such considerations perhaps exceed, as Carleton does her biographers, the limits of my paper's focus on the failure of masculinist rhetorical strategies to contain a subject such as Mary Moders / Wolway / Carlton -- and thus must remain deferred within its confines.

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